Latent demand for vacation travel: A cross-cultural analysis of French- and English-speaking residents of Ontario and Quebec

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Latent Demand for Vacation Travel: 
A Cross-Cultural Analysis of French- and English-Speaking Residents of Ontario and Quebec

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Abstract In contrast to definitions of expressed demand based upon observable buying behavior, the concept of latent demand pertains to those with an interest in participation or "purchase" who have not translated that interest into action. The study reported here investigated variations between French and English Canadians in their latent demand for visiting selected vacation destinations and the relative influences of cultural compared to socioeconomic antecedents upon latent demand. Findings of the study suggested that differences existed between French and English Canadians in their latent demand for visiting selected destinations and that these variations were attributable to both culture and, to a lesser extent, selected socioeconomic factors. The concept of latent demand includes factors constraining the expression of demand; constraints associated with antecedents that influence latent demand are discussed.

Keywords: Latent demand, expressed demand, cross-cultural, constraints, vacation travel, vacation destinations.

The concept of demand is one of the most significant in tourism planning and marketing. Demand is generally defined within the discipline of economics as a desire backed by a willingness and an ability to purchase (Barkley 1977). This definition of demand refers only to preferences that are revealed through observable buying behavior.

While the concept of expressed demand facilitates the identification of individuals who are able and willing to translate interest into buying action, it ignores individuals with interest who do not participate or purchase because of some particular constraint. This unfulfilled interest is termed latent demand (Howard and Crompton 1980). Constraints that inhibit participation may be functions of individual and social circumstances (such as economic, age, psychological, family constraints), may be external physical factors (such as climate, distance, and physical barriers), and may be product-related.
characteristics (such as poor quality services, poor communication and promotion efforts).

In tourism, identifying those exhibiting latent demand for selected vacation destinations and services and understanding factors constraining tourism-related activities are important to understanding and expanding tourist markets. The study reported here examined latent demand and its inherent issue of constraints in the context of Canadian vacation travel. The purpose of the study was to investigate variations between French and English Canadians in their latent demand for visiting selected vacation destinations and to explore the relative influence of cultural and socioeconomic antecedents upon that demand.

Background to the Study

Canada is an officially bilingual and multicultural country. English and French Canadians comprise approximately 60 and 25%, respectively, of the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada 1985). Eighty percent of the French Canadian population resides in the province of Quebec where 82% of all residents are classified as French Canadians.

French and English Canadians are usually differentiated on the basis of “mother tongue” (language first learned as a child and still understood). However, the question of cultural identity in Canada is generally conceded to reach beyond language alone. Findings of previous empirical studies have identified different value orientations among French and English Canadians and have suggested that these are reflected in different lifestyle profiles (Tigert 1973; Plummer 1977), work orientations (Henault 1974; Kanungo, et al. 1976), leisure patterns (Johnson 1979), and consumer behaviors (Mallen 1977). It was the general hypothesis of this study that these differences also translate into variations in patterns of latent demand. The question of variations in latent demand is particularly relevant within the Canadian context because of the importance of Canadian domestic tourism and issues associated with marketing it to Canada’s culturally diverse population.

Canada’s tourism industry is the country’s largest single employer (11% of all employed persons are directly or indirectly employed by tourism), is the country’s fifth largest earner of foreign exchange, and represents over 5% of Canada’s Gross National Product (Tourism Canada 1984). Tourism in Canada is also recognized as “a primary instrument for economic growth, regional development, and the improvement of understanding amongst Canadians and the nurturing of Canadian heritages” (Tourism Canada 1984).

The health of Canadian domestic tourism depends upon the maintenance of current markets and the development of new ones. Groups of individuals characterized by latent demand represent potential tourists. As Crompton and Lamb (1986) contend, the first step to understanding how to increase the responsiveness of a market is to understand why underutilizers are not responsive. In Canada, where French and English Canadians historically have been influenced by different value orientations and separated by socioeconomic disparities, questions of the relative influences of cultural and socioeconomic antecedents upon latent demand are important for understanding and marketing tourism.

Methods

Data used for the study were generated by the 1981 Vacation Patterns Survey, one of the most recent years for which data from this annual survey were available at the time the
study was initiated. Data were collected through in-house personal interviews with members of a nationwide modified probability sample of 3,873 people living in Canada. Details of sampling methodology are presented in a more extensive discussion of this study (Richardson 1986).

For the purposes of this study the sample of 3,873 persons was reduced to a smaller sample size in three ways. First, only respondents who resided in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec were included in the analysis. The sample was delimited in this way in order to control, as much as possible, for the effects of region of residence upon vacation travel demand. Second, only those Quebec and Ontario residents who reported French or English to be both their mother tongue (language first spoken and still understood) and household language (language most often spoken at home) were included in the study sample and considered to be representative of French or English Canadians, respectively. Third, only respondents who had traveled more than 100 miles from their homes and had stayed away from home for at least one night during the two years prior to the study interviews were included in the investigation of latent demand. (Hence, latent demand was assessed only for those who had demonstrated an interest in vacation travel.) These three reduction measures produced a final sample size of 572. Of this sample 334 (58.4%) were English Canadians and 238 (41.6%) were French Canadians.

Data were analyzed through a two-step process. First, differences between the two samples in their latent demand for selected vacation destinations were identified using difference-of-means tests. Second, where significant differences existed, analysis of covariance was conducted to assess potential effects of socioeconomic variables.

**Operationalization of Latent Demand**

Latent demand was operationalized as the difference between self-reported interest in visiting, and likelihood of visiting, 13 selected vacation destinations during the two years following the study interviews. The 13 destinations were each of the 10 Canadian provinces, the Canadian territories, and two American regions—American destinations within 250 miles of the respondents' homes and American destinations more than 250 miles from the respondents' homes.

Latent demand was calculated and examined through a four-step process. First, latent demand scores for each destination (total of 13) were calculated for each of the 572 respondents. These individual scores represented the difference between the respondents' reported levels of interest in, and likelihood of visiting, selected vacation destinations. Both "interest in" and "likelihood of" visit were measured on 10-point Likert-type scales where 1 equaled "not at all interested" and "very unlikely to visit" and 10 equaled "very interested" and "very likely to visit." Second, respondents were divided into two groups representing French and English Canadians. Individual latent demand scores were averaged to identify the latent demand mean of French and English Canadians for each destination. Third, difference-of-means tests, conducted for each destination, identified any statistically significant differences in the latent demand means of the French and English Canadian samples. Fourth, for any destinations for which French and English Canadians displayed significantly different latent demand means, analysis of covariance was performed. This procedure assessed the extent to which significant differences between two samples in latent demand were primarily attributable to the effects of language or the covariates age, education, and income.
Analysis and Results

Results presented in Table 1 indicate that both the French and English Canadian groups reported positive latent demand for all destinations. These positive scores indicate that reported interest in visiting the vacation destinations exceeds the perceived likelihood of such a visit. As such, positive latent demand suggests that members of the sample are constrained to some extent in fulfilling their vacation travel interests. Individuals characterized by positive latent demand represent potential visitors for whom the alleviation or elimination of perceived constraints would encourage visitation.

Latent demand was highest for British Columbia and lowest for Quebec, Ontario, and American destinations within 250 miles of the respondents’ homes for both French and English Canadians. These findings are logical given the higher time, monetary, psychological and convenience costs likely to be associated with travel to distant British Columbia, and the lower costs associated with travel to, and within, nearby destinations. Accordingly, the majority of domestic travel in Canada occurs within the province of residence.

Aside from these similarities between the two samples, there were important differences. French Canadians displayed higher levels of latent demand than did English Canadians for all destinations except Quebec and the territories. (French and English Canadians displayed equal levels of latent demand for visitation to Quebec, and English Canadians displayed higher levels of latent demand for visitation to the territories). Latent demand differences between the samples were statistically significant for 8 of the 13 destinations ($p < .05$): British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

Several of these significant differences deserve special mention. First, differences between the samples for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island as vacation destinations were of a greater magnitude than for all other destinations. Among French Canadians, latent demand for Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island were ranked second and third (after British Columbia). Among English Canadians these provinces ranked fifth and sixth.

The significantly higher latent demand for the Maritime provinces displayed by French Canadians is interesting given the proximity of the Maritime provinces to Quebec, the “homeland” of the majority of French Canadians. Geographically, these provinces neighbor Quebec; visitation to them likely imposes lower costs on the majority of French Canadians in the sample than on English Canadians. An analysis of the raw data used to calculate latent demand for these provinces—mean interest and likelihood scores (Table 1)—identified both higher levels of interest in, and lower perceived likelihoods of, visitation (except for New Brunswick) to these provinces than those reported by English Canadians. The higher interest levels displayed by French Canadians may reflect the “cultural proximity” of these provinces to Quebec. These provinces have sizable French-speaking populations (New Brunswick is, in fact, the only officially bilingual province in Canada). The lower perceived likelihood of visiting these provinces displayed by French Canadians may reflect opportunity costs that are just high enough to dissuade French Canadians from traveling to the Maritime provinces when they are considering a regional vacation. Likewise, when constraints to travel are reduced (e.g., more time and money are available), French Canadians may choose to visit more distant destinations. Hence, the Maritime provinces may suffer from a “so close but yet so far” syndrome in terms of vacation travel decision-making by French Canadians.
Table 1
Level of Interest in, Likelihood of Visiting and Latent Demand for Selected Vacation Destinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>English Canadians</th>
<th></th>
<th>French Canadians</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest (x)</td>
<td>Likelihood (x)</td>
<td>Latent Demand** (x)</td>
<td>Interest (x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>6.8*</td>
<td>4.6*</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>3.7*</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>7.5*</td>
<td>7.4*</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>4.9*</td>
<td>4.2*</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>3.0*</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>4.6*</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.7*</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Is.</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territories</td>
<td>4.3*</td>
<td>2.1*</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA (within 250 miles)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA (more than 250 miles)</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Difference-of-means tests identified significant differences between French and English Canadians in “interest” and “likelihood” for these destinations.

** Rounding errors at different stages of Latent Demand calculation may affect Latent Demand scores by 1 or 2 decimal points.

Sample size for English Canadians is 334; sample size for French Canadians is 238.

Level of interest and likelihood of visit measured on 10-point Likert-type scales: 1 = not at all interested in visiting, very unlikely will visit in next 2 years; 10 = very interested in visiting, very likely will visit in next 2 years.
**Socioeconomic Influences**

The second objective of the study was to explore the relative influence of culture (operationalized by language) compared to socioeconomic influences upon latent demand and, in so doing, suggest possible constraints to vacation travel. Difference-of-means and chi-square tests \( p < .05 \) were first used to test for significant differences between the samples for seven different socioeconomic variables. Three of these variables (referred to here as covariates) significantly differentiated between the French and English Canadian samples \( p < .05 \): age, education, and income. The emergence of age, education and income as covariates is particularly relevant to this study given Walsh's (1986) identification of the predictive role of these variables for recreation-related behavior.

Using the three covariates and the independent variable language, analysis of covariance was performed for the eight destinations for which French and English Canadians significantly differed in their latent demand. Results of this analysis (Table 2) suggested that income exerts relatively little influence upon latent demand (the sole exception to this was for the province of Ontario as a destination where income variations between the samples significantly affect variations in latent demand). The effects of age and education upon latent demand were significant for most destinations. Even when covariates were introduced, language remained the most significant predictor of latent demand, for all destinations but British Columbia. In the case of British Columbia, the effects of covariates eliminated the significant influence of language. Hence, for most destinations, it appeared that neither language nor the socioeconomic covariates independently influenced latent demand. Rather, variations in both language and (to a lesser extent) age and education influenced the variations reported here. Income was not a significant predictor of latent demand.

**Constraints to Vacation Travel**

The significant effects of language and (to a lesser extent) education and age upon latent demand for vacation destinations suggests that these variables might facilitate or constrain the vacation travel of French and English Canadians in different ways. Monetary cost as a possible constraint to vacation travel was explored using household income as a proxy for ability to pay. Hypotheses concerning the constraining or enabling influence of this variable were not supported by the results; income did not emerge as a consistent predictor of latent demand.

The consistently significant effects of language upon latent demand for vacation destinations suggests the influence of language-related and cultural factors. Constraints imposed by the availability (or lack of availability) of tourism information and services in the French language outside of the province of Quebec might differentially affect the latent demand of French and English Canadians. Couturier and Mills (1984), for example, suggested that differences between French- and English-speaking residents of the province of New Brunswick in their levels of awareness of, and visitation to, provincial tourist attractions were attributable to a lack of tourist information published in the French language.

Cultural variations, represented by language, may help explain the variations in latent demand identified here. For example, Henault (1971) suggested in his typology of cultural characteristics that leisure time among French Canadians is a function of the family circle; among English Canadians it is a function of the professional class. The attachment
Table 2
Latent Demand for Visiting Selected Vacation Destinations: T-test and Analysis of Covariance Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Latent Demand</th>
<th>Significance Level of T-Statistic</th>
<th>Significance Level of F-Statistic</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.2</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>.1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec*</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland*</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.0006</td>
<td>.3</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>.0001</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.0004</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>.0002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territories*</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA (within 250 miles)*</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA (more than 250 miles)*</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample size for English Canadians is 334; sample size for French Canadians is 238.

* Difference-of-means tests identified no significant variations in latent demand for these destinations; ANCOVA therefore was not performed.

a Independent (class) variable; probability after adjustment of covariate effects.
b Covariate; probability of effect.
of different meanings to leisure time may introduce social influences that differentially influence the vacation travel of Canada's two major cultural groups.

The notion of constraints to vacation travel is clarified when differences in the "interest" and "likelihood" means reported in Table 1 are further examined. French Canadians were characterized by lower "likelihood of visit" means for all of the destinations except Quebec and New Brunswick. Despite lower "likelihood of visit" means, French Canadians also were characterized by higher "interest in visit" means for 8 of the 13 destinations examined.

Conclusions and Research Implications

The purpose of the study reported here was to compare the relative influences of culture and selected socioeconomic variables (age, education, income) upon latent demand for selected vacation destinations and, in so doing, to suggest possible constraints to vacation travel. The study was undertaken in the Canadian context because of previous empirical documentation of different value orientations between French and English Canadians, the ability to identify members of each cultural group using language, and the historic socioeconomic disparity between the two groups.

The investigation of the relative usefulness of cultural and socioeconomic predictors of latent demand identified culture (operationalized by language) as the most significant predictor of variations in latent demand. The effects of age and education upon latent demand were, however, significant in many cases. Hence, latent demand for visiting most vacation destinations appears to reflect both cultural and certain socioeconomic antecedents. Despite income being often cited as a predictor of demand, and despite significant income differences between the samples, the effects of income upon latent demand were significant in only one case (visitation to the province of Ontario).

Although French Canadians were no less interested in visiting the vacation destinations than were English Canadians, their perceived lower "likelihood of visit" suggests that fulfillment of their vacation travel interests is more constrained than is the case for English Canadians.

Research Implications

According to Schaninger, Bourgeois, and Buss (1985), two principal research issues relevant to French and English Canadian consumer behavior remain unresolved: Are consumption differences due to socioeconomic factors or to cultural factors? Does cultural assimilation influence dominant cultural consumption patterns? This study contributed to the first question in the context of latent demand for vacation travel. Its methodology and findings may serve as a departure point for ongoing research investigating the second issue in relation to vacation travel.

Based upon the findings of this research, several other directions for future cross-cultural tourism investigations are suggested. The first is further segmentation of both French and English Canadian markets to determine the extent to which "uniquely" French and "uniquely" English Canadian markets exist. Accordingly, it would be meaningful to examine the question of cultural assimilation in the context of vacation travel. For example, one might hypothesize that Canadians who identify equally with both French and English Canadian cultures by virtue of place of residence and/or languages spoken have different vacation travel characteristics.
Identification of similarities and differences in vacation-related latent demand among French and English Canadians raises questions whether the latent demand of other cultural groups in Canada and elsewhere is influenced by different antecedents and constraints. The same research issues that are relevant to the Canadian context characterize the U.S. black and Hispanic cultures. Investigation of questions similar to those reported here within other cultural contexts would expand understanding of the tourism-culture link.

While results of this study identified similarities and differences in the vacation destination demand of French and English Canadians, ongoing research into the nature of these markets is warranted. French Canadian society in particular is in a state of ongoing change and factors associated with travel demand will be influenced accordingly. As Saint-Jacques and Mallen (1981) contend, "That which differentiates the French market from the English market in Canada is in constant change. There will always be fundamental differences, but these differences may, with the passage of time, be expressed differently." Findings of the study reported here support the hypothesis that these "fundamental differences" were reflected in latent demand for visiting selected vacation destinations at the time of the initial investigation.

Acknowledgments
The research reported here was completed while Sarah L. Richardson was a research assistant in the Department of Recreations and Parks, Texas A&M University.

References


